



FISHING FACTS

What Is Marine Debris?



PHILLIP MILLER REZK

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines marine debris as any man-made object discarded, disposed of or abandoned that enters the coastal or marine environment. It may enter directly from a ship, or indirectly when washed out to sea via rivers, streams and storm drains. In the last four decades, the world's dependence upon natural materials has been largely replaced with synthetics. When these durable and

highly buoyant items – such as fishing line, nets, gear, cigarette filters, food wrappers, beverage bottles, cans, and grocery and trash bags – enter the ocean environment they can travel thousands of miles on ocean currents, posing a danger to ocean ecosystems and wildlife. Consequently, marine debris has become one of the most pervasive pollution problems facing the world's oceans and waterways.

Where Does It Come From?



The types of marine debris are incredibly varied, but it all shares a common origin – people. In fact, people's mishandling of waste materials and a host of other items constitutes the bulk of the marine debris problem. Most researchers traditionally classify marine debris as coming from **land-** or **ocean/ waterway-based sources**.

Most **land-based** marine debris reaches the ocean when people carelessly discard trash while on land. Debris is also blown into the water or carried by creeks, rivers, storm drains and sewers into the ocean.

People also generate debris while at sea. Like land-based debris, the majority of **ocean/waterway-based** debris reaches the ocean through people's failure to properly dispose of or stow their trash while onboard their boats and vessels.

Fishermen can contribute to the debris problem when they fail to retrieve fishing gear or improperly dispose of fishing-related trash. Abandoned fishing line, gear, nets and other litter, whether discarded on land or at sea, can become debris with damaging and deadly effects.

Impacts of Marine Debris



PHILLIP MILLER REZK

Marine debris poses threats to fishermen, the species they catch, and important fish habitat and breeding grounds.

Discarded or abandoned fishing equipment and other forms of debris can entangle, maim and cause many wildlife species to drown. It is difficult to estimate the total number of debris-related deaths and injuries to wildlife; however, entanglement and ingestion incidents have been reported for at least 267 animal species, including 43 percent of the world's marine mammals, 44 percent of the world's

seabird species and all but one of the world's sea turtle species.¹

Abandoned nets, plastic tarps, fishing gear and other debris can smother and crush sensitive coral reef and seagrass bed ecosystems, many of which are essential fish habitat.

Fishing line, nets, rope and other trash can also wrap around boat propellers and clog seawater intakes, causing costly engine damage and becoming a safety hazard.

¹ The Ocean Conservancy, "Solid Waste and Debris," *Good Mate Recreational Boating and Marina Manual* (2001): 35



FISHING FACTS

Working Toward Solutions

Unfortunately, curbing the debris problem requires more than just removing existing debris. Prevention – changing the behavior that causes marine debris to enter the environment – is the only way to truly manage the marine debris pollution issue.

As part of this effort, monofilament manufacturer Pure Fishing and its subsidiary, Berkley, have established several monofilament recycling programs in the United States. These programs encourage fishermen to discard used fishing line in specially marked containers, which are returned to the manufacturers for recycling. For more information about these programs, visit www.berkley-fishing.com/about_conservation.php#brp and www.floridaconservation.org/mrrp/index.asp.

Fishermen who fish from boats, marinas and docks must also observe Annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). MARPOL is an international treaty that prohibits the disposal of

plastics anywhere in the ocean and restricts the disposal of most other types of solid waste. For more information on MARPOL, please see the NOAA resources guide at www.marinedebris.noaa.gov.



What You Can Do

Individual action can help to control marine debris.

People who enjoy fishing and its related activities can help reduce the amount of debris that enters the oceans and other waterways by following these guidelines:

- Bring ALL of your trash back to shore for proper disposal in trash cans or recycling bins, including all pieces of fishing line and other fishing gear.
- Properly stow and secure waste materials on your boat so that it won't be blown or washed overboard.
- Collect pieces of fishing line and other trash that you see in or near the water and dispose of it properly.
- Learn more about Annex V of MARPOL and the regulations we need to follow. Remember that it is illegal to dispose of any plastic in all navigable waters of the United States and anywhere at sea.

- Encourage your tackle shops, docks, marinas, fishing piers and boat ramps to provide adequate trash cans and recycling bins for used line and other trash.
- Support environmentally responsible marinas.
- Serve as an example to others. Get involved in cleanups in your area and encourage others to help keep the oceans free of debris.



FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

